

CB-25-2016: Promoting Urban Agriculture in Prince George's County

Prince George's County currently offers a tax credit for urban farming, but the county's zoning code doesn't permit urban farming in residential zones, even though general agriculture (rural farming) is already permitted in some of the larger residential zones. By broadening the definition of an urban farm to allow any organization or individual to participate in urban farming, and permitting urban agriculture in a limited number of residential zones, this legislation would enable more urban farmers to access the county's tax credit. This financial incentive can be critical to urban farmers in their startup years.

The legislation also expands urban farming opportunities into the R-80 and R-55 residential zones under strict criteria, further ensuring access to fresh food and the land to grow it is available directly in our communities.

Benefits to Prince George's County

Food access: 1 in 6 Prince Georgians lack proper access to enough nutritious food, leading to high rates of diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. The US Department of Agriculture has declared parts of Prince George's County a food desert. Urban agriculture is an important tool to providing farm fresh foods in underserved neighborhoods, and helps promote healthy eating.

Economic Development: Every new urban farm created can be thought of as adding new small business to the county's economy. These farms generate income for farmers, create local jobs for Prince George's County residents, and generate tax revenue for local government.

Environmental Benefits: Urban farming eliminates long-distance transportation of food, reducing energy consumption and its associated negative air quality impacts. Further, it can help preserve green spaces from development by ensuring they are economically productive.

Education and Community Building: Engagement in food production empowers residents who grow food for themselves, and brings communities closer together. This can help revitalize neighborhoods, teach our youth entrepreneurial skills, and provide for greater awareness of the health and environmental benefits of local food.

Ensuring Quality Farms

Recognizing that urban farming must be of high quality to thrive in residential communities, CB-25 requires all urban farms to cooperate with the Prince George's Soil Conservation District and operate under an approved farm management plan. This provision helps ensure farmers will be successful while minimizing the potential for any public nuisance. If the property is within a municipality, a letter of support from the municipality is required.

In addition to a farm management plan and municipal support, there are requirements that a farm be properly maintained, including litter removal, irrigation, pest control, and compliance with the county code for any permits or accessory structures onsite. Finally, urban farms cannot have livestock or chickens, a necessary compromise to prevent complaints from neighbors.